

JESUS
AND THE JURY

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JESUS AND THE JURY

A Living Faith for Living Men

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JESUS AND THE JURY

I

AT the age of thirty Jesus crossed the threshold from the quiet years of preparation into his public ministry. At that time he had a deep conviction about himself and the work he was to do which few if any shared. Just what form that conviction took at first, and the steps by which it grew through the years of his public life, may not be clearly set forth. It must have been present in some significant measure at the beginning. Something impelled him to set out on his mission. He who was to say, "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time . . . But I say unto you," carried a conviction of authority in spiritual matters that presumed a peculiar relation with God.

Would that authority ever be evident to other men? John, in truth, was to introduce him in the exalted terms of his own belief, but there was no reception committee to greet him, no eager band of followers awaiting his leadership on his own terms. "Neither did his brethren believe in him," is a statement that appears in the record.

Think of Jesus, then, beginning his work, when the very reason for it, and the basis of it, was a belief about himself which he held practically alone. His work was to be far more difficult than to teach certain truths in which he believed. He must awaken a belief in himself which would give him the spiritual leadership and authority which he claimed. The truth which he was to teach was not like the truth of a mathematical proposition which could stand regardless of the character of the man who taught it. His spiritual teaching was to center in his personality. His mission was not merely to reveal a truth, show a way,

declare a life. He must make men see that he was the way, the truth, and the life.

This was the supreme test of his life. It was not a lesson which he could teach by word, and which men could learn by rote. Men must see it, feel it, and believe in it with a sincere, spontaneous conviction which should be their very own.

II

ONE of the most significant things which he did at the very outset of his public ministry was to call a group of twelve men about him. There are evidences that he chose these twelve men deliberately with a great deal of care. To one and another he said, "Follow me." They obeyed his call, knowing little about him, and having no clear conviction as to what he was and what he was about.

Jesus' calling of the twelve may be described as merely the gathering of a number of pupils, whom he was to instruct in the truth he desired to give to the world. Thus he would make them his helpers while he lived, and his successors to carry on his work after he had gone. But there is a deeper significance than such a description brings out, in his gathering this group to live with him in closest intimacy.

In calling the twelve, Jesus really impaneled a jury. He proceeded to live the evidence of his faith before them. He sought to win from them a verdict in support of his exalted claims.

There is first the interesting coincidence that the number of his disciples was twelve, just the number of men on whose judgment we have long been accustomed to rely in all capital cases at court. There seems to be no account as to why there are twelve men in the traditional jury. Why not ten, or fifteen? It may be that Jesus himself popularized that number and gave it a real significance in the opinion of mankind. Whatever its origin, it has come to be accepted as offering just the right possibilities of variety and diversity in point of view to insure a competent judgment. When a unanimous verdict of twelve men has been won, it would seem that the matter in question has been settled. There is no need to go further.

The coincidence in the matter of number in case of the disciples and a standard jury is on the whole superficial. There are other and more striking parallels in the situation.

III

As we consider the personnel of the group which Jesus called about him, we must be convinced that it was an ideal jury. It is just the kind of a jury that would be sought in any modern instance, where a life or a reputation might be at stake. The men whom Jesus chose were average men from the ordinary walks of life. They were all of them seriously occupied with the business of living. There were a few fishermen, small tradesmen. There were probably artisans of one kind and another. There was one man who held a small public office. Let us call the roll of this interesting group of men who were to sit in judgment in the most important case ever presented to a jury for their verdict.

The first, Simon, who was called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee,

and John his brother; Philip and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphæus, and Thaddæus; Simon the Cananæan, and Judas Iscariot. How significant it is to call this list of names! A name is a personal thing. It stands for individuality. The Bible is a book of names, filled with stories, not of men, but of this particular man and that, expressing the force and flavor of distinct personalities. Here were twelve real men, who, considering the walks of life from which they came, the wide practical experience they had, were sure to bring to the problem before them a capacity for the truest kind of judgment.

In his essay on popular culture, John Morley refers to an old saying, that "It is the end and aim of the British constitution to get twelve honest men in a box." Of course it is the end and aim of the constitution of any enlightened people to preserve for them their inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. For the most part this work is done con-

structively without any thought of the need or uses of a jury.

It is assumed that these rights will be protected and extended. But the point is that when the rights of any man are attacked, or when he may stand in jeopardy for his life and liberty, then the bulwark of justice is the judgment of twelve good men and true. To such a group the appeal is made and even the law waits on their verdict.

What is the point of the jury, and of such juries as are proverbially sought in cases where life and liberty may be involved? It is that the truest and best judgment that may be obtained is the verdict of men whose point of view is not that of the specialist or the technical expert, but that of the man who sees life whole from the standpoint of his own first-hand experience in the business of living.

The specialist as a rule has narrowed his study of life to one particular phase. He probably knows that phase better than any

jury of average men that could be assembled. But we feel sure that he is apt to be detached, and cannot see things in true proportion. He can do many things well. His services are always needed. When it comes, however, to judgment on such questions as the truth of statement, the sincerity of motives and the integrity of character, the civilized world passes by the expert and seeks the opinion of ordinary men. By ordinary men we simply mean those who are living in all of life's normal relationships. They do not know theories of life. They do know the facts of living. Their judgment between right and wrong will often be an intuitive judgment, — a feeling about the truth, born of a practical knowledge of the value in all of life's vital phases.

IV

It has often been suggested that the time will come when small bodies of experts will take the place of the traditional jury in judging the character of men on trial. That day is long distant. Today the experts are merely allowed to testify before a jury. Even that occasions misgivings. Usually, as many can be massed on one side as on the other, whether the question be about brainstorms, complexes, or the relation of endocrines to moral responsibility. It is still held to be wise, after the learned specialists have spoken, to let the jury decide how much truth there is in what has been said.

Were your life at stake, were your character on trial you would not present your case for vindication to experts and specialists. You would use their help, but for final judgment you would pass them by. So far as you could trust

such an issue to any men, you would seek men who, out of a serious experience in living, would carry every question of the truth or falsity of speech or action, your own or the witnesses against and for you, back to the field of their own first-hand knowledge of life. Such men Jesus chose. Such men are chosen today when men come to judgment.

When we come down to it, back of every other issue which those men had to weigh was the question of the plain honesty of Jesus. The men who came in contact with Jesus never questioned his ability. He knew what he was saying and doing. His sincerity in saying and doing what he did was clearly the point at issue. Jesus was to bear witness concerning himself. Was he a reliable witness? He made extraordinary claims about his truth. Was he telling the truth?

This is a point which many of those who cannot accept Jesus on his own terms seem to miss altogether. There are those who ignore or

deny certain of his claims and still profess to respect him. They even call him in as an authority in matters where they do agree with him.

The contemporaries of Jesus who denied his claims did not shrink from the inevitable alternative. They called him false. "He deceiveth the people." Thus the enemies of Jesus were more honest than some of his self-styled friends of later years. There can be little doubt that when Jesus was personally present he forced this issue. Any man would force that issue.

Granted Jesus' unusual ability and his extraordinary capacity for clear judgment, then the question of his fundamental honesty becomes one of the greatest significance. We might hesitate over the capacity of the jury Jesus drew to interpret for us every phase of the truth he taught. We must feel that no better judgment could ever be found as to the integrity of his life and purpose.

V

STILL another parallel in this story of the jury is the fact that Jesus did seek a verdict from his disciples. The evidence was presented in a remarkable way. Most juries review situations after something has happened, or scenes are reenacted before them by the men who plead. The jury in Jesus' case was on hand in the original situation. They followed and lived through the real scenes when he was demonstrating the truth or the falsity of his amazing claims.

It is not fanciful to say that Jesus worked for a verdict from his disciples. Most of the things he did in the quiet demonstration of his faith were done before them rather than directly to them. They were on hand to see and to hear. He did not declare to them, "This is the truth about me, which you must accept."

He never tried to force them. He did try to lead them along the ways of understanding. Again and again with an appealing modesty he sought to read their hearts to see whether the conviction which he wanted to find was yet dawning within them.

When many of his followers were turning their backs on him, he said to the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" How tensely he must have waited for the reply. On another occasion he said, "Who do men say that I am?" He did not care about that. It was only his hesitating way of coming to the point about which he did care. "Who say ye that I am?" That is the whole spirit of his dealing with the twelve. Not, "I say I am this or that"; but, "Who say ye that I am?"

On this occasion he received from Peter a reply that thrilled his soul, and set him exulting. He saw his work established, and the continuance of that work assured because another man had at least glimpsed the conviction

that he had about himself. It was the fact that Peter saw it, and the certainty that he would sometime see it more clearly, and that they all would see it, that set his cause on foundations like rock. Surely if this inspired conviction could come to Peter, it would come to others, and the gates of hell could never prevail against the faith he had brought to men.

Peter's glimpse of the truth was just a flash. It was premature. The verdict was not yet positive or unanimous. Jesus charged the twelve to say nothing more about it. More evidence must be lived and given.

That jury made the remarkable record of following the case for three years before they reached the final verdict. Not all the evidence they heard was favorable. They heard men say that he was a gluttonous man and a wine-bibber, a man in league with the devil, one who deceived the people, that he was guilty of most awful blasphemy, a traitor, one worthy of death.

The case was, in fact, seemingly taken out of their hands by a mob. Jesus was seized, arrested, and tried before another court, of ecclesiastical experts this time, condemned and put to death. All through this period they had no clear, courageous conviction about him. But all this was part of the evidence. It was the summing up, the final demonstration of his worth or worthlessness. When we consider the character of the verdict they rendered, we shall have to include in the evidence the remarkable experiences they themselves relate that came to them after Jesus' death. It was then that their groping judgment was crystallized into powerful conviction.

VI

THE twelve reached a verdict. It would be a pity to try to reduce that verdict to a statement. No words signifying that Jesus is this or that can come anywhere near representing the character and power of the conviction which flamed in them at the conclusion of this remarkable case. They tried to put it into words. They claimed everything for this man with whom they had lived in unique relations for these three years. But it is the testimony of their lives which is most convincing. Their verdict was not a reasoned statement, but a living demonstration. It is the only sort of verdict that ever counts in connection with Jesus.

One is tempted to say that their verdict was unanimous. Poor Judas with his tragic suicide, and his "I have betrayed innocent blood,"

all but made it unanimous. A man like Judas does not kill himself because of some trifling mistake in judgment. What he saw in Jesus at the end made his act of betrayal impossible to bear. There have been other betrayers of Jesus, but who has ever shown a profounder remorse?

There was one impressive difference in the verdict they rendered which lifts it above the usual conclusions of juries. Always, when juries render a verdict they are through with the case. They are free to go back to their homes and attend to their business, to enjoy again the comforts of normal life. When this great jury rendered its verdict, the men who composed it had really just begun with the case. They proceeded to back their verdict with their lives, displaying a marvelous devotion to the cause of the man they had vindicated.

They had had an extraordinary experience with a remarkable person. He had changed

their thinking. He had made God real to them in entirely new terms. He had brought them to see new meanings in life. In short, he had brought life to them. They felt it all to be the most wonderful experience that could come to men. They were irrepressibly grateful for it. They set out to pass it on to others with the passion of men who have found a longed-for cure or have discovered a long-sought promised land.

It would be interesting to call the roll of that jury, and to hear from each the story of all that was done in witness of the sincerity of their faith in Jesus. Probably all of them gave their entire lives with a full measure of heroic effort to advance the cause in which they believed so profoundly. Tradition has it that many of them crowned years of courageous witnessing with the supreme sacrifice of life itself, happy to add what weight that sacrifice might be to their compelling faith.

Who would not covet such a verdict? Just

such a judgment has never been rendered in any other case. Were they not twelve good men and true? Think again what kind of men they were. Practical men of the hard-working type. They had been brought up in the school of shrewd bargaining. They knew the value of commodities in the market. They knew the worth of money. They must have had large experience with knaves and charlatans. They were not men to throw away the meager comforts of life for a dream or an idea. They came slowly and painfully to the conclusions that finally gripped them. Then they gave up everything and devoted their whole lives to prove how much they meant what they said.

Does any one imagine that any appeal could ever have induced them to reconsider their verdict? Can any one imagine that any kind of evidence known to modern doubt or scepticisms could ever have made them reverse their verdict? No wonder that Jesus was willing to stake all his hopes on the kind of faith he

sought to evoke from such men as he knew them to be.

He rested his case with them, and ever since their time his case has rested with such as they were. Paul once wrote "that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called." Before we think that such words (and they do recite the facts of the history of Christ's cause) belittle the power of his appeal, let us remember it is just such judgment that any one of us would seek in any of the vital issues of justice and truth.

VII

IT might seem to be the obvious conclusion to this story that the appeal of Jesus will always seek out and attract only the common men and women, a phrase that will never lack beauty and dignity since it was said that "the common people heard him gladly."

We are not left, however, solely with the thought of a distinction between one class of people and another. The distinction reaches into our individual lives. In every one of us there is the common man, the human being, seriously concerned with the business of living, feeling his kinship with all mankind. This man has the normal hopes and aspirations common to all who live genuinely. He has a feeling for justice, an instinct for truth. He wants things to be right, and in a common-sense sort of a way believes that sometime he will find that

they are right if he only acts according to the best he knows. He is not fooled by pretense either in himself or in others.

It is at the same time true that we are educated away from this more human view and feeling about things. The most carefully trained mind may help tremendously in the business of real living. It also has its perils. It may set itself up as an expert, and usurp all the right to judge. It may check the instinctive hopes and convictions that are more a matter of intuition or affection; and because it fails to see the proof it demands, refuse to the rest of the life the freedom to express itself in the faith that attracts it like an inspiration from heaven.

Sidney Lanier apostrophized his own generation in these rather tragic words,

“O Age that half believ’st thou half believ’st,
 Half doubt’st the substance of thine own half doubt,
 And, half perceiving that thou half perceiv’st,
 Stand’st at thy temple door, heart in, head out!”

The situation which Lanier describes in that last line is unfortunate, and may be very unhappy. But it is not as unhappy as the situation that usually prevails when there is a debate between the head and the heart. A half-believing, half-doubting, half-perceiving head often will not let the heart go into the temple at all. It bars the way, it keeps the life back from any act of worship so long as it is not satisfied with all the evidences of faith.

VIII

THERE is nothing right or reasonable in directing our lives that way. There is a saying of Chesterton that, while it is commonly said that the insane person is one who has lost his reason, as a matter of fact the insane person is one who has lost everything but his reason. He is more likely to be one who has kept his reason, but has lost his love, his humor, his sense of proportion, and all the checks, balances, and guides which the reason needs.

The doubting and perplexed head should not only let the heart go into the temple, it ought to accompany it there, and wait reverently and with eager interest through the heart's devotions. There will be food for thought, new clues to a truer understanding, as the reason follows the instinctive judgments of the soul. It need not follow dumbly, but as the ally of

faith to articulate and interpret what God may reveal.

All the problems concerning Jesus were not settled for the disciples as they entered into their heroic work to make him known everywhere. But meanwhile they were bound to him by a devotion that never wavered. Problems enough awaited their heads, striving to keep pace with the daring visions and judgments of their faith. There is no real trouble in that. All men need the stimulus that comes from the challenge of perplexing and seemingly baffling questions. He who will not let his heart get out in front of his head lives on the shores of a dead sea, where, if the tide never ebbs away, neither does it surge to the flood to start him over new seas of discovery.

Our heads may always be perplexed. The reasons for faith may never seem adequate or clear. That is the stimulating atmosphere in which we ought to live. But the heart need not be troubled, if only we have the courage of

our convictions. Great phrase that! Courage to render a verdict in accord with our convictions, and then to follow through with all there is of us to where that verdict leads.

It is a great saying of Bishop Gore that "a man must be strong at the center before he can be free at the circumference of his being." You may think that in pledging your life according to the convictions of your heart you are making a slave of your mind. You are not. You are setting it free. You are giving it direction. Strong and loyal to the truth at the center of your being, you can be the freest of men in thought. The whole world of thought, the universe itself will beckon you to search out the hidden things. Meanwhile if you have the courage of your convictions, your heart need not be troubled.

IX

EVERYONE knows Richard Watson Gilder's little poem which for some reason or other he called "The Song of a Heathen."

"If Jesus Christ is a man, —
 And only a man, — I say
 That of all mankind I cleave to him,
 And to him will I cleave always.

"If Jesus Christ is a God, —
 And the only God, — I swear
 I will follow him through heaven and hell,
 The earth, the sea, and the air!"

Probably Gilder called those verses "The Song of a Heathen" because he felt that by many people it would be considered a very inadequate profession of faith. Let us admit right here that we are as often led wrong by the experts who believe as by those who doubt. The latter will not let us "cleave" until full proof has been

found for faith. The former will not let us "follow" until faith is expressed in certain forms.

Gilder's "Song of a Heathen" is an ideal declaration of allegiance. Think of the tremendous problems left to be solved. "Is Jesus a man?" "Is Jesus Christ a God?" That question may challenge the mind for many a day, perhaps all one's days. All expert knowledge, every special resource may well be brought to bear on that problem.

While these questions remain to be worked over and worked out if possible, the matter of greatest importance is settled courageously, splendidly. "I will cleave to him," and "I will follow him," in either case. Jesus accepted his disciples on that basis. From that point, in his actual company, it took them three years to reach a positive verdict. If they had not begun at that point, if they had not followed him through those years when they did not understand all, if they had not been held by a

loyalty that had its roots deep among the intuitions of their hearts, they never would have come to their final verdict at all.

Let us remember that this inspired judgment of the very human man is the soundest judgment there is in all the world. It does not mean giving way to the emotions. It is not a matter of being influenced unduly by sentiment. The fact is we may need to revise our whole idea of what enters into a true judgment.

X

It is one of the happy results of the new spirit both in philosophy and science that the intellect is being put in its place. It is a very honorable place, but less than has often been claimed for it. There is a great deal of truth in this paragraph from a recent essay by G. A. Studdert Kennedy: "The popular idea is that men act upon reason and women act upon impulse. The truth is that men act upon impulse and discover an elaborate reason for it afterwards, while women act upon impulse and don't bother about the reason at all."

Then he writes more seriously: "We are not born rational. We are born reasoning, which is a very different thing." A true rational judgment in his mind must be the product of genuine experience, and is bound to be affected by the instincts and impulses that play a part in experience. He maintains that "a sublime

and adequate religion" can alone insure a rational judgment in any vital matter.

Our truth-hunting adventures are not always sincere. At least they are not serious enough. There is no drive behind them, no compulsion growing out of conscious need. There are to-day people who are known as "parlor-communists" and "pink socialists." In comfortable places, far removed from the stress of the economic conflict, they play with the theories of social revolution. For the real radical who is living through the thing, and to whom the injustices and inequalities of the social order are terribly real, we can have only respect. For the dilettante, content with "sipping the nectar of experience while he keeps aloof from its deeper interests," we have nothing but contempt.

There are such people as parlor theologians and pink Christians. There is no chance that they will discover the truth, or know it if by chance they happen upon it. The faith Jesus

gave to the world is a faith for living men. One must have the sincerity and earnestness begotten by a real experience in living if he is to find any clue to the meaning of faith.

“Faith,” writes L. P. Jacks, “is neither a substitute for reason nor an addition to it. Faith is nothing else than reason grown courageous — raised to its highest power, expanded to its widest vision. Its advent marks the point where the hero within the man is getting the better of the coward, where safety, as the prime object of life, is losing its charm and another object, hazardous but beautiful, dimly seen but deeply loved, has begun to tempt the awakened soul.”

“Another way of saying the same thing is to name religion the ‘new birth’ of the soul. But a new birth which, while changing all the rest of the man, left his reason unchanged, which turned all the rest of him into a hero, but kept him still reasoning with a coward’s logic, would not amount to very much.”

“Dimly seen but deeply loved.” That surely means an impulse of the whole life, eager to live, dominating the reason with its enthusiasm and its purpose.

XI

RECALL Jesus' characteristic appeals, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden." "They that be whole need not a physician; but they that are sick." "I am not come to call the righteous but sinners to repentance." Any one who knows Jesus' mind knows that there are no "righteous" who need no repentance. It is impossible to escape the thinly veiled irony in those words. Jesus could do nothing for the men whose hands did not reach out for help.

The Pharisees came to Jesus with their question about the baptism of John. It was a perfectly good question to which there was a clear, true answer. But Jesus did not answer it, because the questioners were not honestly committed to obey the truth, whatever it might be.

In one of Basil King's stories there is the following interesting conversation between a young man, seeking to solve a difficult problem, and an older man of whom he is seeking counsel.

" 'The difficulty is,' he said after a long silence, 'that it's often hard to know what is right.'

" 'No, it isn't.'

"The flat contradiction brought a smile to the young man's lips, as they trudged onward.

" 'A good many people say so.'

" 'A good many people say foolish things. It is hard to know what's right chiefly when you are not in a hurry to do it.'

" 'But when you want to do it?'

" 'You will know what it is. There'll be something to tell you.' . . .

" 'But doesn't it happen that what you call "something-to-tell you" tells you now and then to do things that most people would call rather wild or crazy?'

“ ‘I dare say.’

“ ‘So then what?’

“ ‘Then you do them.’

“ ‘Oh, but’ —

“ ‘If there’s an “Oh, but,” you don’t. That’s all. You belong to the many called, but not to the few chosen.’ ”

XII

IT all comes to this. Detached from the business of living, we have no impulse to carry us over into the truth when we see it. Faith in Jesus is not a puzzle. It is not a game. It will always be a problem for the mind. It is first of all an answer to life. It takes the whole of life, aroused to make the most of itself, to recognize the beauty and truth of that answer.

In every one of us there is the man who lives, who learns from living, and to whom living is the supreme adventure. In his contacts with evil, before he has thought about evil in the abstract and become busy with theories about it, he instinctively feels that all evil is wrong, hideous, in every form hostile to his soul. When its stain is on his soul, he wants to be cleansed as from something foul and dirty.

In his contest with evil, he knows he needs help from some spirit that can lift him up. Before him, always, he must have somewhere the vision of a life pure and unspotted from the world.

The man in us, to whom actual living is the real thing, the divine and marvelous thing, this man in his contact with sorrow, before he has come to think much about the common lot of men or any stoic philosophy has come to repress the protest of his soul, feels the poignant heartbreak in sorrow. He feels instinctively that there must be an answering pain in the heart of God, believes that sorrow calls for a comfort that is divine, and that all love denied here must have its fulfilment in God's eternity.

When a man gets away from his study and mere thinking, and goes out into the thick of life, then he responds to his fellows as brothers. "Races," "lines," "threats of color" depart from his mind. Then he has the instinctive democracy of a child. He sees himself in the

other man's place and the other man in his place. So he judges, if he must judge at all. The world of men is a brotherhood, only potential as yet; but he is ready to acclaim the faith that can furnish the key to world-wide friendliness.

While with his cautious mind a man thinks about God, and his thoughts wander along many a futile trail, the living man hungers and thirsts for God. Alone, he believes he has a Father somewhere. Homeless, he knows he has a home. Out of his own need he is ready to respond to the love of God when it calls.

It is not strange that hundreds of years before Jesus lived certain men, living close to their fellow men and the God they knew, made predictions of One who was to come, that have seemed supernatural in their character. They had but to consider the needs of their own lives, to read the story of the tragic failures and impotencies of mankind with the never-dying dream of a life true and worthy; and then


project their thoughts, inspired by faith, along the lines thus noted, to see them all converge in the revelation God must make of himself to redeem and establish the life he had created.

Before ever he came Jesus was prophesied out of the life of mankind. He was demanded as a symbol and an inspiration by a life striving to rise to higher levels. These prophecies never named the man, nor fixed the hour of his birth, but when Jesus of Nazareth came he was seen as the fulfilment of that prophecy.

Life that is real, life that will "dare the vision," — its face turned persistently from the clod, — asks such help from heaven; and behold, when Jesus comes clearly into view, sees in him the answer to its prayer.

So to the living, very human, very needy and eager man in us, still close enough in touch with God to receive those flashes that come not by way of "flesh and blood," Jesus appeals, I am your way, your truth, your life. Follow me.

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